

January 26, 2011

Education Appropriations Sub-Committee Meeting

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services – Response to Committee Member requests for additional information or questions needing IVRS staff input.

Representative Ron Jorgensen asked, are there other options (local non-profit organizations) where clients on the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) waiting list could obtain comparable services?

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) serve the most significantly disabled (MSD) adults who are on the IVRS waiting list. The Medicaid Waiver and IVRS both fund the same population of individuals to receive services through those programs. This population generally receives services through the sheltered workshop, adult work activities, or supported employment if they are served by a CRP. There are individuals who are MSD and are not served by a CRP because their disability is not cognitive but more physical in nature. These individuals might go to college through VR funding assistance, PELL, etc. To the best of our knowledge there is only one CRP that serves the most significantly disabled individuals with Autism, and that organization is in Altoona. Their funding is through the Medicaid Waiver as IVRS cannot fund sheltered employment or residential services.

The significantly disabled (SD), by The Vocational Rehabilitation Act definition, are not individuals who are typically served by CRPs in general. We might have some individuals who we believe should be considered MSD and are working toward helping them better define their disability so they can access services through the waiver and then receive assistance through a CRP. However, the majority of the individuals that IVRS serves who are SD do not necessarily qualify for funding or services through a CRP or other private nonprofit. Some would receive assistance through worker's compensation if they were disabled on a job. In that case they could access services through a private rehabilitation insurance provider. However those individuals are always referred to IVRS because the private insurance plan does not usually cover all their rehabilitation expenses. In addition, those individuals really need IVRS services because we can help them be re-trained and get back into the job market. There are also students who are transitioning from high school who are considered SD but would not participate in a CRP program either by choice (they do not like to be identified with CRPs because of the stigma) or because it is not an appropriate program for them. In general a person who is SD and on our waiting list might go to college, participate in customized training, or a program of self-employment or other training and IVRS is the only entity that provides that funding or direct service.

CRPs depend upon funding from the Medicaid Waiver, IVRS and other outside funding to be able to provide the services. Currently, IVRS contracts with forty-two CRPs in Iowa to provide some specific services to individual clients.

Representative Greg Forristall requested a definition of cognitive disabilities and perhaps a listing of disabilities that would be listed in that category.

Cognitive disabilities are generally individuals who have an intellectual disability. The old terminology of mental retardation or borderline intellectual functioning is the typically thought of individual who is considered to have a cognitive disability. That would be the Vocational Rehabilitation definition. However there are some organizations that combine various disabilities within this “title” and depending on that organization you might also find:

- Individuals with serious learning disabilities
- Individuals with borderline intellectual disabilities
- Individuals with mental health issues where the limitations are primarily manifested according to the person’s ability to learn and comprehend information.

Representative Ruth Ann Gaines requested additional information regarding IVRS’ work with high school age students and the age range of our clients.

The IVRS Transition Model shows that IVRS begins to work with students the first semester of the sophomore year of high school. However, when IVRS went into the waiting list due to staff capacity and resources IVRS was required to delay the initiation until the junior year. While best practice would be for IVRS to begin the first semester of the sophomore year, due to restraints it was decided we must delay until the second semester of the junior year.

IVRS staff provides services to high school age students in the following ways:

Transition – General:

IVRS works with students who are transitioning from secondary education to post-secondary education or work. IVRS provides services to students in high school in the form of: counseling and guidance to identify a vocational goal and the services necessary to achieve that goal, and then provides the experiences to better discern the vocational aptitudes and interests with the student. More extensive training is provided upon graduation from high school along with job placement services. IVRS works in collaboration with the schools in determining who is best suited to provide the service and follow up with the student. Upon graduation IVRS provides the necessary support, service, and stability that the student requires to achieve success.

Collaborative Transition Protocol (CTP):

The Collaborative Transition Protocol is a system of decision-making that IVRS is slowly expanding throughout the State. We are fully implemented in AEA 267, partially implemented: in the Dubuque Area Office, Fort Dodge Area Office (AEA 8), Ottumwa Area Office, Burlington Area Office, Polk Area Office, and North Central Area Office (specifically Marshalltown, and Ames).

The State of Iowa education system made the positive and appropriate decision to refrain from labeling students with a diagnosis such as mental retardation or learning disability. This positive step allowed students to better understand their limitations instead of impacting their confidence and self-esteem. The difficulty this created for the adult service delivery system,

such as IVRS, was that the adult system was based on the medical model and required a diagnosis. Consequently adult services still had to do testing to obtain a medical diagnosis. This resulted in IVRS spending a large sum of money to obtain a diagnosis.

IVRS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have access to students' Individual Education Plan (IEP). These documents provide critical information for Counselors in determining eligibility for services and in the development of a VR client's Individual Plan for Employment.

The CTP allows IVRS to determine eligibility on the basis of the information contained in the students' IEP without a diagnosis and then applying a coding rubric so the case can still be coded according to a disability classification. This project has allowed IVRS to use the financial resources that were once used to pay a psychologist for a "label" (diagnosis) and instead use those resources for services. The cost of assessments in this category has substantially reduced such that IVRS now spends only one tenth of what it used to spend on diagnostic assessments. Now the only time such an assessment is purchased is when the information in the IEP is so conflicting that testing is required to more clearly define the disability code for reporting purposes.

IVRS has achieved 100% accuracy in determining eligibility for services with this process

Transition Alliance Programs:

IVRS has 6 projects in the State of Iowa that provide:

- Assessment to determine a vocational goal and what services are necessary to achieve that goal
- Counseling and guidance to understand oneself and the necessary supports and needs to achieve a goal
- Vocational direction to understand the labor market, job demands, skills necessary, and how the individual demonstrates the necessary job match qualities
- Training specific to the occupation that is customized on the job to provide the student with work experience and references
- College training is provided to those students whose vocational goal, work experience, and disability all connect to require college coursework to be employed
- Placement on a job that is commensurate with a person's interests, aptitudes, skills, capabilities, etc.

These projects are a joint venture with the school district and IVRS with staff from both collaborating together to provide the services listed above.

Age Range of IVRS Clients:

IVRS receives some referrals at age 14 that have physical disabilities and require our assistance. Then we work with anyone who desires employment which can be well past the age of 60. Once a person retires, unless they require part time work, IVRS staff no longer works with them through the Vocational Rehabilitation program.